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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practicum was to determine the response of faculty members and students to the possibility of producing a pamphlet listing instructional methodologies and course requirements for classes at Gaston College (North Carolina). A questionnaire was completed by twenty-five instructors and twenty-five students, and additional information was acquired through several personal interviews. The results showed overwhelming support for the proposal from the students, whereas faculty were almost evenly divided in their views. Faculty objections to the proposal included: (1) it would limit academic freedom; (2) it would result in instructional inflexibility; (3) students would avoid certain instructors; (4) students would be exposed to a limited variety of instructional methodologies; (5) it would create extra work for teachers; and (6) instructors would be unfairly labeled. Both students and instructors agreed that the pamphlet would affect class enrollments and reduce student withdrawals, especially early withdrawals. Based on the results of the questionnaire, personal interviews, and related literature, the author recommends development of the instructional methods and course requirements pamphlet. A format for the pamphlet is presented. (AH)

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A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPILATION OF REQUIREMENTS AND TEACHING METHODS OF COURSES AT GASTON COLLEGE

by

Dean H. Jones, M.A.

Gaston College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

NOVA UNIVERSITY

APRIL 14, 1975

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INTRODUCTION

Not long ago a Gaston College student approached the writer with an idea worthy of serious consideration by the college administration. The student proposed that a system be established at Gaston College whereby students could know before registering for courses a teacher's instructional methodology and requirements. The student, a mature military veteran, felt that such information would lessen frustration and anxiety by allowing students the opportunity to select the learning environment best suited to their needs.

From the student's suggestion has come this practicum project. It must be always the objective of the community college to facilitate the learning process of students. It is a known fact that numerous students drop courses within the first few days of an academic term. Sundry reasons are given for these early dropouts but one notable explanation is usually overlooked: students often are unprepared and unequipped to cope with certain course requirements and instructional methods. To illustrate this point, perhaps an example or two should be cited. The writer once registered for a course in logic while a student in college. The course description in the college catalog gave no indication that symbolic logic would be the primary emphasis of the course and that a substantial background in mathematics was essential. With the writer's poor mathematical background, the course turned out to be almost a disastrous experience. Only a few students remained in the course through its entirety, and the writer happily accepted a final grade of "D". This negative experience could have been avoided had the students been aware of the instructor's methods and requirements before registration.

Only recently a student dropped a course which the writer is teaching. The course was abandoned after the first day of class. Encountering the student a few days later, an inquiry was made as to the reason the course was dropped. The student's reply was: "If I had known I would be required to make an oral presentation to the class, I never would have registered for the course." A required oral report was terribly threatening to this particular student! There are those who would argue, of course, that this is precisely what college is all about, to create confidence in students and prepare them to adjust to new situations and experiences. It may also be contended that a highly humiliating and embarrassing experience could make the student's fear of public speaking even worse.

Students are not machines to be manipulated. Each student is unique with distinct traits and preferences. Some students prefer the lecture method of instruction; others prefer more non-traditional approaches to instruction. It is strongly contended that Gaston College should provide students with a summary or synopsis of course procedures and requirements. Such a compilation would give students a choice concerning instructors and courses. It is believed that students can perform better academically when they know what is expected of them. Learning is best achieved when it is a joy rather than a chore.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Carl R. Rogers, the distinguished teacher, researcher, and writer, once made the following comment:

> I see the facilitation of learning as the aim of education, the way in which we might develop the learning man, the way in which we can learn to live as individuals in process. I see the facilitation of

> learning as the function which may hold constructive, tentative, changing, process answers to some of the deepest perplexities which beset man today.
>
> But do we know how to achieve this new goal in education, or is it a will-of-the-wisp which sometimes occurs, sometimes fails to occur, and thus offers little real hope? My answer is that we possess a very considerable knowledge of the conditions which encourage self-initiated, significant, experiental, 'gut level' learning by the whole person. We do not frequently see these conditions put into effect because they mean a real revolution in our approach to education and revolutions are not for the timid.[1]

The proposed change at Gaston College delineated in this practicum is by no means radical or revolutionary, but it is one small step toward enriching the learning environment of students. If the educational institution fails in its challenge to facilitate learning, then it has fallen short of its primary mission.

What is being proposed in this practicum is "education by choice." Students should have the opportunity to select the learning structure which best fulfills their talents and abilities. This is why it is imperative for students to know the instructional methods and course requirements of teachers. A good example of "education by choice" is now occuring in the school system of Quincy, Illinois. High school students can now choose between two different teaching methods: ultraliberal or the traditional middle-of-the-road lecture style. Tests at the end of the program's first year indicated that students' over-all academic growth rate and knowledge levels matched the national norm. A study by an outside consultant concluded that both students and teachers developed a better attitude toward school. The program has not shown, however, that making school more

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[1]Carl R. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning," The Helping Relationship Sourcebook, eds. Donald L. Avila, Arthur W. Combs and William W. Purkey (Poston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973), p. 218.

enjoyable makes students learn more, because the academic growth rate has not outstripped the normal norm.[2]

"If our society remains diverse, if there is a premium placed on diversity, then people will not accept a single way of educating," said Dr. Brandt G. Crocker, assistant district superintendent.[3] Crocker said that "the idea of a choice is for me a very American kind of concept."[4] A young high school junior commented about this innovative program: "People have different ideas and they work better in different situations."[5]

The notion of freedom of choice cannot be overemphasized. It is extremely difficult for growth and development to occur in an environment where there is little or no freedom of choice. Students can best develop their skills and competencies when they have the opportunity to make decisions for themselves.[6] To deny students vital information concerning requirements and methods of instruction in college courses is to deprive them of the inherent right of choice. There is no logical reason for students being denied any information which will facilitate their learning. After all, students are citizens and taxpayers as well as adults. They have a right to know the kind of product they are buying. Who wants to buy a product without first looking at it? The community college, as an educational market, should openly display its goods and allow its consumers to pick and choose.

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[2]Article in, The Gastonia Gazette, January 20, 1975, p. 6A.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]W. W. Purkey, "The Task of the Teacher," The Helping Relationship Sourcebook, eds. Donald L. Avila, Arthur W. Combs and W. W. Purkey (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973), pp. 261-262.

Closely related to the concept of freedom of choice is the notion of freedom from threat. Students undoubtedly learn best in an environment characterized by challenge and little or no threat.[7] A student who has a speech impediment, for an example, already feels threatened and inadequate because of this deficiency. If he should enroll in a history course and finds out that he must participate in a class debate, the problem obviously worsens. On the other hand, if the student knew about the required debate, he would at least have the option to register for a similar course which does not have this particular requirement. Such a student is more apt to make better progress in a class where this kind of threat is removed. When students are in a classroom atmosphere in which they are assured of personal security and when they are convinced that there are no threats to their egos, they will be able to move forward in the process of learning.[8]

Based upon past experiences, students usually know in which learning environment they experience the most academic success. It seems only natural that educational institutions should provide the opportunity for students to select those learning situations which make for success. B. R. Bugelski has said that "nothing succeeds like success."[9] Success generally results in a raising of the level of aspiration, and failure in a lowering.[10] Success breeds success. It increases student motivation; failure lowers student motivation.

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[7] Ibid., p. 262.

[8] Carl R. Rogers, Freedom to Learn (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 159-161.

[9] B. R. Bugelski, The Psychology of Learning Applied to Teaching (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), p. 259.

[10] Robert M. W. Travers, Essentials of Learning (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), pp. 170-171.

An unpleasant consequence of failure is the loss of self-confidence on the part of the individual concerned. When failure leads to a loss of confidence and a lowering of self-esteem, it becomes an obstacle to growth and learning. Students need to feel adequate in capacity and skill to deal effectively with new situations.[11] It is asinine to directly or indirectly place students in situations which may lead to failure and loss of self-confidence, but this is precisely what happens when vital information concerning course requirements and teaching procedures is withheld from students. Awareness of course requirements and teaching methods should greatly improve the student's chance of success.

It may be argued that the college catalog gives sufficient information concerning courses. The typical college catalog gives only vague descriptions of courses. Such course descriptions are so general and ill-defined that they are of little value to students. Students are constantly asking counselors about the content and requirements of courses even though they have read the course descriptions in the college catalog. It is quite obvious that course descriptions in the college catalog are inadequate in meeting the needs of students. More detailed information is needed so that students may know what to expect before registering for courses.

It is no secret that some instructors prefer to remain secretive about their course procedures and requirements. They seem to prefer clandestineness and surreptiousness rather than openness and ingenuousness with respect to their educational requisites. B. R. Bugelski referred to

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[11]Karl C. Garrison and J. Stanley Gray, Educational Psychology (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), pp. 261-262.

this cryptic behavior as the "educational mystique."[12] This term means that the instructor is in complete charge and is the only one who knows what the course entails. Students are left to wonder until the first day of class and sometimes later about teaching methods and course requirements. Instructors thus give the impression that they are the only ones who have the right to know what is coming or what will be required in a course of study.[13] Is this right? Shouldn't students also be entitled to this important information? Keeping students "in the dark" concerning course procedures and requirements until after registration is a poor way of facilitating learning. Students have the right to know what is required of them before they enroll in a course.

The old notion that learning must be characterized by severity and difficulty still lingers among teachers. Instructors zealously avoid being labeled "easy." When asked about providing students with preregistration information concerning course requisites, one instructor responded: "A lot of students wouldn't take my courses if they knew what was required beforehand." What is not recognized by instructors is that fewer students would probably withdraw from courses if they knew what to expect before enrollment. If a student is unwilling or unable to cope with the requirements of a course, the instructor would be better off not having the student in his class. Students and instructors both can gain from this information being made available to students.

To freely welcome students into community colleges without utilizing every possible method to help them succeed is grossly unjust. The high

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[12]Bugelski, op. cit., p. 256.

[13]Ibid., p. 255.

dropout rate of students in community colleges is appalling. Dr. John Roeuche has remarked "that the open door has become the revolving door in the community college."[14] Statistics show that more than half of the students who enter community college never finish the first year. Only about twenty percent continue to earn a four-year degree.[15] These statistics clearly indicate that something is wrong in our two-year institutions and that some meaningful changes need to take place. Perhaps a little compassion wouldn't hurt. The time has come for teachers to abandon their "sink or swim" attitude toward students. It is strongly believed that Gaston College should furnish students a summary of teaching methods and requirements of all courses taught at the college. Such an innovation would give students an opportunity for "education by choice."

PROCEDURES

In conducting the study, a questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of gathering specific data from Gaston College students and faculty. The following questions were asked of both groups.

1. Should Gaston College provide students with a compilation or synopsis of instructional methods and requirements of courses taught at the college?

2. If you think that this is an unwise proposal, what objections do you have to it?

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[14]Opinion expressed by Dr. John Roueche in a lecture at Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, North Carolina, January 26, 1974.

[15]Gerald M. Know, "Is a Community College Right for Your Child?", Better Homes and Gardens (September, 1973), pp. 20-30.

3. Would this information affect the enrollment in various courses?

4. Would this information reduce student withdrawals, particularly early withdrawals? (It is assumed that some students drop courses after learning about specific course requirements).

Those faculty members and students who agreed with the proposal were asked to respond to two additional questions:

5. Should this information be distributed to individual students or kept in a centrally located place where it would be accessible to students?

6. What specific data should be included in course summaries?

Questionnaires were handed out to twenty-five faculty members and twenty-five students from the college's Academic Programs. Only those individuals willing to complete a questionnaire were given one. The questionnaires were returned to the writer's office, although several questionnaires had to be personally collected from faculty members.

In addition to the information collected from the questionnaires, the writer discussed with colleagues and students in more detail the pros and cons regarding the proposal. These informal discussions proved to be invaluable. Questions and problems arose from these discussions which were not considered when the project was first proposed.

The most difficult aspect of this undertaking was securing information from other studies done on this topic. As far as can be presently determined, few if any institutions provide students with the kind of data which is advocated in this paper. The novelty of this proposal has been substantiated by the sparsity of information concerning it in the literature.

The rationale behind the procedures employed in the investigation was to determine the opinions and feelings of those individuals who would be most affected by the implementation of this proposal, namely, students

and faculty members. It would be asinine for a college to adopt a proposal which students or faculty did not deem useful. The adage "look before you leap" perhaps best describes the rationale behind the procedures utilized in this study.

RESULTS

In the practicum proposal the following expectations were stated:

> It is expected that this study will demonstrate overwhelming support from the student body regarding this proposal. In connection with this expectation, more students than faculty members will favor the proposal (some faculty members will be threatened by it). The study will indicate that this information concerning teaching methods and course requirements will be frequently utilized by students.

The investigation strongly corroborated these expectations. The major results of the study are summarized below.

1. Gaston College students overwhelmingly favored the proposal whereas faculty members were slightly opposed to it. Only one student among the twenty-five students who participated in the survey rejected the proposal. Among the twenty-five faculty members, twelve responded affirmatively to the proposal and thirteen opposed it. It came as a surprise that almost half of the faculty members liked the proposal. It had been erroneously assumed that only a few faculty members would support the recommendation.

2. Numerous objections to the proposal were cited by those opposing it. The only student who rejected the proposal declared: "The proposal would take away a teacher's privacy in what he or she wants to do." Interestingly, this student is planning to become a teacher.

Faculty objections to the proposal were as follows:

a. It would limit academic freedom. But what is academic freedom?

b. It would not allow for changes in courses to meet the needs of particular groups of students. Two instructors indicated that the implementation of this proposal would result in instructional inflexibility.

c. The college catalog gives an adequate description of each course. This objection was mentioned twice. As pointed out in the background narrative, course descriptions in the catalog are extremely vague. What this proposal calls for is not simply course descriptions, but also instructional methods.

d. Program deans already have a synopsis of the courses. This is true, but how does this information help the students?

e. This information would encourage students to select or choose certain instructors and avoid others. The faculty member who voiced this objection was concerned about students selecting teachers based upon personality and popularity.

f. Students should be exposed to a variety of teachers and instructional methodologies. If a student preferred the lecture method, he or she would select only those teachers who utilize this teaching technique. The implication in this argument is that some sort of educational deprivation would occur if a student were not exposed to various instructional methods.

g. College students hould be mature enough to adapt to any classroom situation. "Students are being coddled too much as it is," claimed a teacher. There seems to be a strong feeling among teachers in the community college that students are not being treated as adults.

h. Students would not use the information if they had it. The faculty member who made this objection said that students would still obtain most of their information about teachers and courses through the "grape vine."

i. Instructors would be unfairly labeled and permanently categorized if such information were made available. Supplying information about instructional methods and requirements of courses, a teacher declared, would inevitably lead to student attitudes such as: "If you don't like essay tests, never take a course under Professor Brown"; "The trouble with Professor Jones is that he doesn't permit class discussions"; "Professor Smith is the only history teacher on campus who requires a numerical average of 70 to pass his course; the other history teachers require only a 60 average."

j. It would create extra work for teachers. A common complaint among teachers is that they are already overworked. Probably less work and frustration would result if teachers adopted a more systematic approach to instruction. Barton R. Herrscher remarked that every teacher should have a "system" which guides his teaching.[16] Preparing course summaries probably would be beneficial to teachers in helping them to systematize and methodize their work, resulting in greater efficiency.

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[16] Barton R. Herrscher, "Alternatives to the Invalid Assumptions of Current Educational Practice," Toward Instructional Accountability, eds. Barton R. Herrscher and John E. Roueche (Palo Alto, California: Westinghouse Learning Press, 1973), p. 49.

3. It was the consensus of faculty members and students that course enrollments would be affected if information about instructional methods and course requirements was supplied to students preceding registration. Students were more convinced than instructors that such information would affect the enrollment in some courses either favorably or unfavorably. Twenty-one students maintained that course enrollments would be affected by this information; three students anticipated no change at all in course enrollments; one student was uncertain. With regard to teachers, thirteen predicted enrollment modifications in some courses if this information were available to students; six saw no indication of change; six teachers were simply uncertain. One professor was emphatic about the possible impact of this information on class enrollments. He stated that "the easier the professor looks on paper, the more popular his course would be with certain students." Another teacher responded: "Students would probably select the courses with the least work."

4. Students and teachers agreed that information about course methods and requirements would reduce student withdrawals, particularly early withdrawals. Students overwhelmingly indicated that this data would reduce withdrawals from courses. Twenty-two students took this point of view. A typical response of the students was made by a female sophomore: "It would definitely reduce withdrawals because I have personally withdrawn from courses because of teaching methodology."

Among the twenty-five faculty respondents, twelve believed that a synopsis of teaching methods and requirements would reduce the number of students withdrawing from courses. Eight instructors maintained that this information would not have any influence on withdrawals. Five instructors were uncertain about how this data would bear upon withdrawals. Among the

instructors who believed that this information would reduce the number of students who withdraw from courses, one commented: "It would reduce course withdrawals in that students would have a better understanding of the requirements and expectations of a particular course." Another teacher lamented: "I have found that if an instructor gives a class any work to do, students drop the course."

5. Students and instructors preferred keeping this information in a centrally located place where it would be accessible to students. Fifteen students favored a centrally located place for this information. One student remarked: "If a person is a serious student, he will make it a point to go wherever this information is kept." The Learning Resources Center was mentioned most often by the students as the best site for this kind of data. The other nine students favored the distribution of this information to individual students.

Of the twelve instructors who supported this proposal, nine advocated a central location for the housing of this information whereas three instructors preferred distribution to individual students during registration periods. The Learning Resources Center was suggested as the most suitable place for keeping this material by those instructors who opposed distribution to individual students.

6. Regarding items to be included in course summaries, in descending order of the most frequently mentioned, students listed the following items:

a. Grading system.

b. Course scope (material to be covered).

c. Course goals.

d. Required papers and projects.

e. Type of tests (essay, objective or some combination).

f. Method of instruction (lecture, discussion, etc.).

g. Required reading.

h. Number of tests.

i. Attendance policy (the policy of the teacher and institution often differ).

j. Course prerequisites.

k. Required oral reports.

l. Make up policy of teacher.

m. Test dates.

Faculty members manifested similar ideas to students as to what should be incorporated in course summaries, but there was a difference in the number and ranking of these items.

In descending order of the most frequently mentioned, instructors cited the following particulars:

a. Method of instruction.

b. Course scope.

c. Course goals.

d. Grading system.

e. Required reading.

f. Required papers and projects.

g. Number of tests.

h. Type of tests.

i. Course prerequisites.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of this investigation, the following suggestions are made with regard to the question of whether students

should be provided with a compilation of instructional methods and requirements of courses at Gaston College.

Firstly, Gaston College most definitely should provide students with a summary or synopsis of instructional methods and requirements of courses. Students currently do not have access to such information. Course descriptions in the college catalog are grossly inadequate. A compilation of course requirements and instructional methods would enable students to select the learning environment best suited to aptitude, interest and temperament. The number of students withdrawing from courses probably would decrease considerably if this data were supplied to students. A significant number of students drop courses within the first few days of the academic term after learning a teacher's "standard operating procedure." Why should students be made to wait until they have been in a class for several days before learning what it is all about?

Community college students have enough obstacles as it is. They are predominantly individuals who have had to struggle to continue their education. Most of the students in community colleges have not been successful at their high school studies. Instead of A's and B's in high school, community college students usually made C's.[17] In short, they need all the extra help they can obtain. Every possible effort should be made to facilitate learning and promote academic success for the community college student.

Secondly, each instructor should be asked to submit to the Dean of Instruction a course synopsis of each course he or she teachers. After

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[17] K. Patricia Cross, Beyond the Open Door (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1971), p. 15.

these course summaries have been received by the Dean of Instruction, they should be inserted in a brochure or pamphlet in the most intelligible manner for students. Perhaps a good arrangement for the booklet is as follows:

SUMMARY OF COURSES IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
DEPARTMENT OF ART

Course Summaries of Professor A

Course Summaries of Professor B

(Remaining Professors in Alphabetical Order)

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS

Course Summaries of Professor A

(Remaining Professors in Alphabetical Order)

(Remaining Departments in Academic Programs in Alphabetical Order)

SUMMARY OF COURSES IN TECHNICAL PROGRAMS

(Same Procedure as Academic Programs)

SUMMARY OF COURSES IN VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

(Same Procedure as other Programs)

Thirdly, it is recommended that the pamphlet of course summaries be placed in the Learning Resources Center at Gaston College. In addition to the copy in the Learning Resources Center, each counselor and faculty advisor should possess a copy. This should make the information readily available to inquiring students. It would be too costly to distribute copies to individual students.

Fourthly, the pamphlet of course summaries should be constantly revised when new courses are introduced and new instructors are added to the faculty. The Dean of Instruction should be responsible for making the required revisions and coordinating the total activity.

Fifthly, at least the following elements should be included in each course summary or brief:

1. Course scope.
2. Course goals.
3. Required reading.
4. Required papers and projects.
5. Method of instruction.
6. Grading system.
7. Type of tests.
8. Number of tests.
9. Test dates.
10. Attendance policy.
11. Required oral reports.
12. Make up policy of teacher.
13. Course prerequisites.

The writer has designed a summary of a course which he teaches in religion. Perhaps it will illustrate what has been recommended in this report.

COURSE: Religion 103 (New Testament Survey)

INSTRUCTOR: Dean H. Jones

COURSE SCOPE: An introduction to the history, literature and theology of the New Testament with primary emphasis on the literature. For each New Testament book such topics as authorship, date, destination, purpose and content are critically treated.

COURSE GOALS:

1. To help students to examine the New Testament thoughtfully and objectively.
2. To encourage independent study and research among students.
3. To introduce students to the tools necessary for a serious study of the New Testament.
4. To familiarize students with the culture of the Graeco-Roman world from which the New Testament sprang.
5. To place at the student's disposal a compact guide to the essential facts that will help him to interpret the New Testament for himself.
6. To offer a general integrated approach which will increase understanding of the New Testament and a love for it.

REQUIRED READING: The New Testament: An Introduction to its History, Literature, and Thought by C. Milo Connick is the textbook. Additional reading will be required from various sources. A reserved shelf of required readings is maintained in the Learning Resources Center.

REQUIRED PAPERS AND PROJECTS: Each student will be required to do a scholarly investigation of a New Testament book and submit in writing.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION: Mostly lecture. Class discussions are encouraged if relevant to subject. There will be one slide presentation of the country of Palestine.

GRADING SYSTEM: Students will receive final grades based on the following system:

90 - 100	A
80 - 89	B
70 - 79	C
60 - 69	D
Below 60	F

Final examination will count 25% of grade

Term paper will count 25% of grade

Weekly quizzes will count 50% of grade

TYPE OF TEST: Objective

NUMBER OF TESTS: Ten weekly quizzes plus final examination. The final examination will cover untested material only.

TEST DATES: A quiz each Friday.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Three unexcused absences.

MAKE UP POLICY: All tests and papers must be completed before a final grade is given.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: None

It seems obvious that this data could be of significant value to students. Since the college catalog does not contain most of this data, and in view of the fact that incoming students rarely have contact with students who already know the instructional methods of various instructors, this sort of information could help students to select those courses which complement their learning patterns and styles.

It is the right of every student to know what is expected of him in a course prior to registration. Such knowledge would lower the number

of students withdrawing from courses and enhance academic performance. College courses should not be clothed in secrecy but open for examination and inspection. Those who are critical of this information being available to students probably would never consider purchasing a piece of clothing without trying it on or buying an automobile without a test drive. Shouldn't students have the same privilege? The needs of students must always come first in the academic community.

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JUN 20 1975

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION